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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses preservice training for educators in the area of child abuse. The relationship between disability and abuse is examined, as is the placement of abused children in special education programs. Analysis of 13 students' questionnaire responses indicated that as a result of a child abuse course, 92% had shared information from the course with their colleagues, 77% had done further reading in the area, and 46% had reported a suspected case from among their student population. The authors discuss plans to evaluate four models for preservice training in child abuse offered at three other undergraduate and graduate settings. (CL)

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Child Abuse and Neglect:

University - Based Preparation

for Special Education Personnel*

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Abstract

In recent years, the authors have provided preservice training in the area of child abuse to special educators in four universities. The present paper presents a rationale for such training, describes four models for delivery of instruction and examines instructional outcomes.

Child Abuse and Neglect:

University - Based Preparation for Special Education Personnel

The subject of child abuse and neglect has become an American concern in recent years (Bourne & Newberger, 1979; Halparin, 1979; Helfer & Kempe, 1979; Kline, 1977; Martin 1976; Soeffing, 1979; Thomas, 1977). As Soeffing (1975) has stated it, abuse and neglect "is a serious national problem, a societal disgrace, and a personal nightmare" (p. 126). Although incidence figures differ greatly due to such factors as definitional differences (e.g., broad vs. narrow definitions), under-reporting by professionals and failure to report multiple abuse within families, it is generally thought that between one and four million cases of child abuse occur in this country each year (Gil, 1979; Light, 1973; National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1979).

Child Abuse as a School Concern

Prior to the 1970's child abuse was more frequently associated with the preschool rather than the school-aged population. In 1969, however, Gil reported that 47.6 percent of the 1,300 incidents of physical abuse that he had investigated involved school-aged children. Thus, we had entered into a period in which it was recognized that about half of the children who are being abused are seen daily by teachers (Education Commission of the States, 1977; Halparin, 1979; Klein, 1977). As Gil (1969) concluded:

> The classroom teacher should become the most important link in the preventive and protective chain, since his daily contacts put him in a strategic position to observe early indications of abuse. (p. 2)

More recently, Halparin (1979) has written:

> If a family has children, sooner or later they must be enrolled in a day-care facility or elementary school. Thus, the school stands as a common contact point for all families with youngsters. Further, this contact is maintained on a daily basis over an extended period. The dual factors of frequency and longevity of teacher-student relationships facilitate positive attitudes toward the teacher and school on the part of the child and an empathic understanding of the problems of the child on the part of the educators. Both these factors are key elements in identifying and working with maltreated children and their families. (p. 3)

Relevance to Special Education Preservice Training

The special educator is particularly interested in the area of child abuse and neglect. Indeed, by official vote of its delegate assembly in 1974, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) recognizes abused and neglected children as exceptional children (McCaffrey, 1978; Soeffing, 1975). The following three subsections shall consider (a) the handicapped child as a child "at risk" for abuse, (b) the effects of abuse in terms of long-lasting handicapping conditions and (c) the association between child abuse and placement in special education programs.

The Handicapped Child as an "At-Risk" Child

To date, little evidence supports the notion that the existance of a handicap causes child abuse. However, several writers (Soeffing, 1975; Sandgrund, Gaines, & Green, 1974; Morse, Sahler, & Friedman, 1979) have

provided data which indicate that these two variables are correlated.

Kempe and Helfer (1972) have suggested that three factors are necessary for the occurence of abusive incidents: an abusogenic parent, an "at-risk"/different child and a crisis situation. Krantz and Finch (1977) portrayed this multivariate relationship/model as shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

As Martin (1976) put it,

> We see completely normal children who are abused, regardless of their physical condition, neurologic integrity, sex, length of gestation, etc. Because of the factors within the parent and perhaps additionally the social conditions of the family, a child may well be abused regardless of his condition. Indeed, it is my belief this is usually the situation in the child abuse syndrome. Nonetheless, there are some children who, without some special condition might never have been abused. This is the situation where the psychological makeup of the parent and cultural-social conditions place the child at slightly greater risk of abuse than the general population. However, some characteristic or aspect of the child might then be just enough to tip the balance and ignite abusive behavior from the parent....When a child is not able to meet the parent's expectations, or when the child is going through a specific developmental stage of his life, it may be then that he is physically abused. The injury may be partly a response to a provocation of the child. (p. 38)

The Effects of Abuse

According to Soeffing (1975), the research literature is much more extensive and definitive on the sequelae of abuse (i.e., abuse as the cause of handicapping conditions). In Soeffings's words, "Studies of

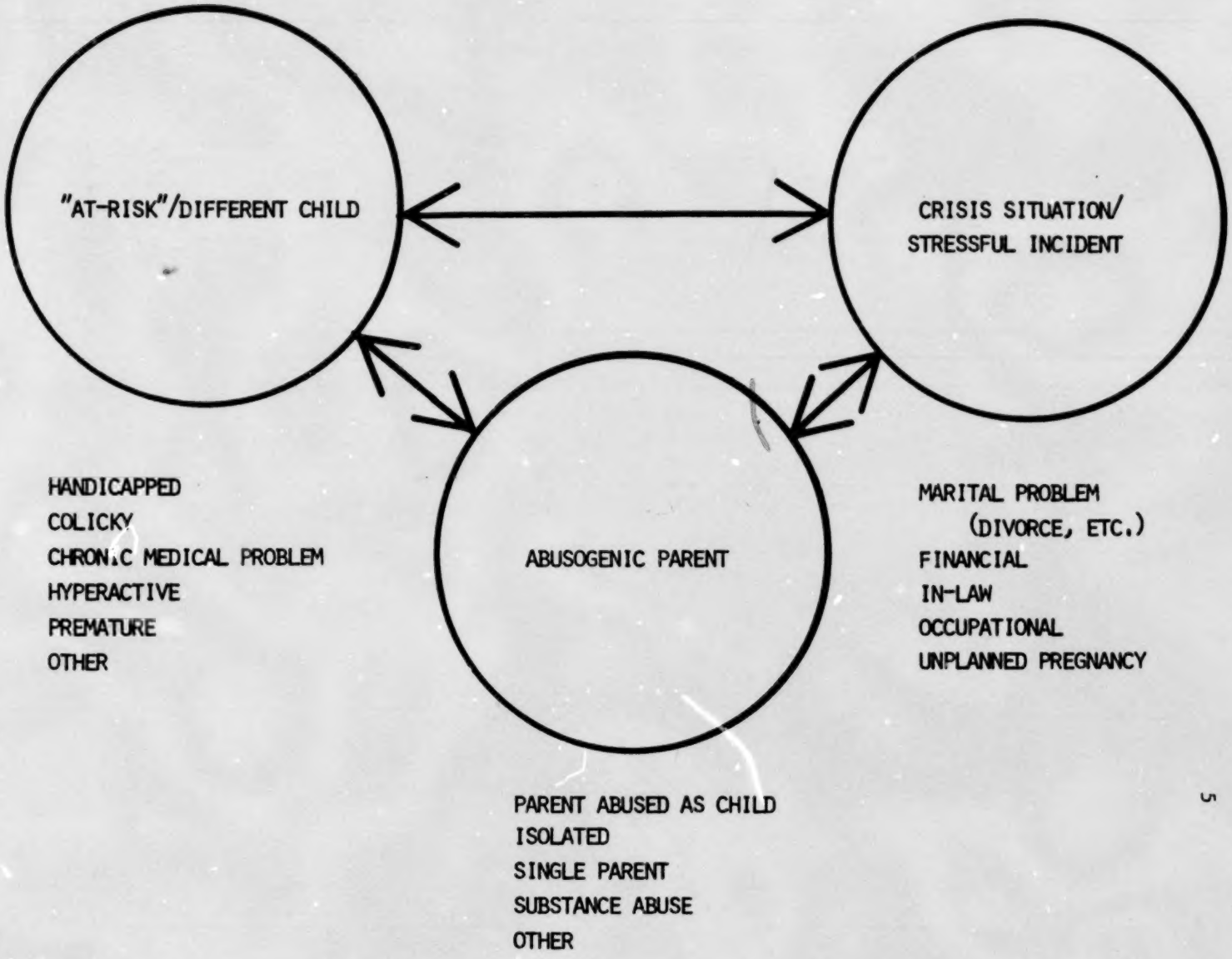

FIGURE 1. ANATOMY OF AN ABUSIVE INCIDENT
(COURTESY OF STEVEN KRANTZ AND ELLEN FINCH)

abused children have reported high incidences of retardation, emotional disturbance, physical defects, neurologic problems and growth failure" (p. 128). These effects have been reported by several authors including Sangrund, Gaines and Green, (1974); Martin, 1972; Martin, Beasley, Conway and Kempe, 1974; McRae, Ferguson, and Lederman, 1973, and Elmer and Gregg, 1967.

Placement of Abused Children in Special Education Programs

To date the literature concerning the relationship between abuse and educational handicaps is quite sparce. In one of the few studies concerning this relationship, Kline and Christiansen (1975) found that the frequency of special education placement was significantly greater (27%) for 138 children adjudged abused than it was for their non-abused peers (8%) in 10 Utah school districts. Among the other firdings in their study was that over half (22 of 37) of the abused children placed in special education programs were found in programs for the emotionally disturbed (ED). The two findings reported in this subsection were statistically significant at the .01 level.

The remainder of the paper examines four models for preservice training of special educators and the effectiveness of that training.

Models for Special Education Preservice Training

Table 1 presents four models for preservice training of special educators in the area of child abuse.

Insert Table 1 about here

The authors wish to stress that each teacher training institution is unique organizationally. The models reported above in Table 1 reflect available resources (e.g., staff/facilities), and policies (e.g., single department vs. cross-listed courses) which guide/regulate colleges, departments and areas within their institutions and therefore, may not be workable in other settings.

Effectiveness of the Training

Figure 2 presents follow-up data received from former students in Stile's Fall, 1979 graduate-level child abuse course at New Mexico State University (see Table 1 for further information regarding this class). Three months after the completion of all coursework, students were contacted via a questionnaire and a short cover letter which explained the purpose of the study. The questionnaire and cover letters are contained in Appendix A. Thirteen out of 15 students (86%) returned completed questionnaires. Major findings were that as a result of the child abuse course, 92% of the students had shared information from the course (e.g., components of the State's reporting law) with their colleagues, 77% had done further reading in the area and 46% had reported a suspected case from among their student population.

Table 1

Models for Preservice Training of

Special Educators in Child Abuse

	SPED Prefix	Name of Course	Level	Other Departments Involved (if any)	Major Assignments (Other than Exams)	Enrollment (Limit and Actual)
University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire (Bavolek)	Yes: SPED 665	Child Abuse and Neglect: Educational Implications	Junior/ Senior/ Graduate	No	Research Paper (1) Questions in Text Conduct 3 interviews in Field (Graduate only)	130 (120)
Utah State University Logan (Bavolek; London)	Yes: SPED 300	Child Abuse and Neglect: A Multidisciplinary Approach	Sophomore	Yes: ELEM ED FHD[1] PSYCH SW	None	Unlimited (178)
University of Wyoming Laramie (Stile)	NO	Selected Problems in Child Abuse and Neglect	Junior/ Senior/ Graduate	SW[2]	Report News items (optional) Abstracts (5) Mock Data reporting (1)	35 (27)
New Mexico State University Las Cruces (Stile)	Yes; SPED 503 / Yes: SPED 495 (Fall, 1980)	Special Topics / Special Topics in Child abuse Inter	Graduate / Junior/ Senior/ Graduate	No / Yes: CEP SW	Abstracts (15)[3] / Unknown at this time	20 (18) / 120 (?)

1. Department of Family and Human Development
2. As adjunct professor/special education students enrolled outside their department
3. At least 1 from Government Documents Section of Library

Insert Figure 2 about here

Data has recently been collected regarding outcomes of the the Utah State and Wisconsin training. However, analysis was not completed in time to permit reporting in the present paper.

Conclusion

As pointed out previously, teachers (as well as other school personnel, such as administrators) are in a unique position to impact upon abused children and their families. Special educators are often involved due to the "at-risk" nature of handicapped children and sequelae of abuse which include handicapping conditions seen in special education programs. However, despite a legal (50 states have mandatory reporting laws for schools and school personnel) and ethical responsibility to intervene, preservice training is not presently available in all teacher-training programs. When available, training is often limited to a one-hour guest lecture or a unit of instruction within an elective course. The authors, therefore, repeat here the following three recommendations of the Education Commission of the States (1977):

1. Since teachers and other professional personnel can be held both legally and professionally responsible for not making appropriate referral of suspected cases of child abuse and neglect, it becomes incumbent upon preparatory programs to provide training.

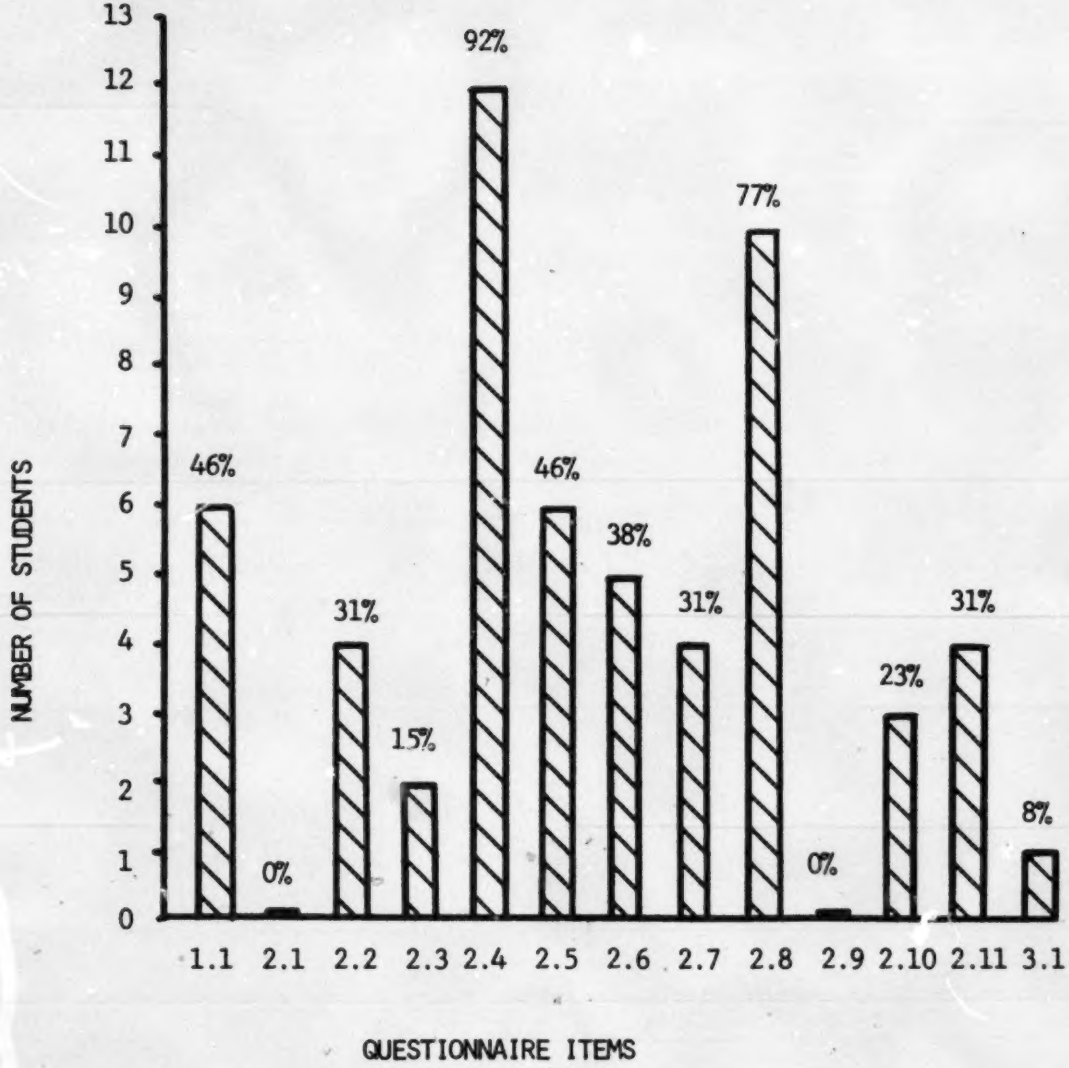

FIGURE 2. THREE-MONTH FOLLOW-UP DATA FROM STILE'S GRADUATE-LEVEL CHILD ABUSE COURSE (N = 13)

2. Based upon present state statutes, teachers and other school personnel are obligated to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. It follows, therefore, that as a minimum, preparatory programs should provide instruction in: (a) identification of the abused and neglected child and (b) appropriate policies and procedures for making a formal request for further investigations.

3. Teacher education programs should give serious consideration to [not] recommending an individual for certification in the absence of instruction in dealings with suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. (p. 14)

Further information on course content, outcomes, etc., can be obtained by writing directly to the authors at their offices. Such requests will be welcomed.

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APPENDIX A

Stile Questionnaire

and Cover Letter

March 26, 1980

Attached please find a short questionnaire which I am using to gather information relative to my presentation on college-level training in the area of child abuse/neglect at the International CEC Conference in Philadelphia on April 25.

As a former student in SPED 503 (Fall, 1979), please take a few minutes to indicate how you have employed course information/skills since the completion of the semester on December 19, 1979.

I would appreciate your response as soon as possible prior to April 1, so I can begin to analyze the data.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Stephen W Stile

Stephen W. Stile, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Special Education

SWS:ekdw

enclosure

CHILD ABUSE QUESTIONNAIRE

Indicate (by placing a check in the corresponding box) which of the following apply as a result of the course (feel free to make additional comments on the back of this sheet):

1.0 Legal Responsibility

1.1 Have personally reported a suspected case of child abuse ☐

2.0 Ethical/Moral Responsibility

2.1 Have developed ☐ used ☐ a parenting curriculum in my school for purposes of primary prevention.

2.2 Have held conference(s) with child/children suspected of being abused ☐

2.3 Have held conference(s) with parent/parents suspected of being abusive ☐

2.4 Have shared information with colleagues (e.g., how to report) ☐

2.5 Have provided ☐ requested ☐ inservice training in the area of child abuse.

2.6 Have investigated local district policy (e.g., on reporting) ☐

2.7 Have investigated local community services (e.g., parent hotline) ☐

2.8 Have done further reading on the topic ☐

2.9 Have joined ☐ developed ☐ school or community-based prevention team.

2.10 Have developed reporting policy ☐ form ☐

2.11 Have kept anecdotal records relative to a suspected case ☐

3.0 Other Miscellaneous

3.1 I am more aware of the problems but have not yet had an opportunity to employ information/skills to date ☐

3.2 (Other comments/additional information which might be shared with conferees)